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THE "ANTI-ANTI-TACTICAL BALLISTIC MISSILE" EFFORT
An Analysis of a Close Encounter with Bureaucratic Politics

[Or: "How bureaucratic politics were used to shoot down the development of a missile system which could shoot down missiles which could shoot down traditional Air Force roles and missions in NATO."]

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The "Anti-Anti-" Tactical Ballistic Missile effort . . . say again? No, the typist did not "hiccup" after the first "anti", nor is an attempt being made to lift dialectic analysis to new heights unimagined by Hegel. The following case study briefly recounts the Air Force's successful campaign to derail the perceived threat to its organizational raison d'être posed by (Army owned and operated) Anti-Tactical Ballistic Missiles (ATBMs) and the Tactical Ballistic Missiles (TBMs) which ATBMs are designed to counter. From the Fall of 1986 until the Summer of 1989, I was a witness/protagonist in a power struggle among the Air Force, Army, USEUCOM, JCS, OSD, NATO, and key US allies over the implications of ATBMs and TBMs in the European theater. The meteoric rise/demise of the NATO ATBM project is a classic example of bureaucratic politics at work in the domestic/international "military-industrial complex," and it provides useful insights into players, positions, and processes in European "defense politics."

The recent interservice squabble over TBMs and ATBMs is a variation on an old, familiar theme. Ballistic missiles (e.g., ICBMs) and anti-ballistic missiles (ABMs) have long been familiar features of the political-military landscape. Shorter-range tactical ballistic missiles (e.g., US LANCE missiles, Soviet SCUDs, and their cousins) are also well-established systems. For many years, there have been cliques within OSD and the Army who have zealously sought greatly expanded roles for offensive and defensive ground-launched missile systems. Many in this camp share the unshakeable, "gut-level" conviction that manned aircraft (and the "highly annoying types" who fly them) are becoming increasingly obsolescent and decreasingly cost-effective on the modern battlefield. The colorful series of skirmishes fueled by these long-standing, bureaucratic animosities over "manned aircraft versus missiles" had been quiescent since the early 1980s, when the Air Force, with help from the NATO allies, had successfully "shot down" the OSD/Institute of Defense Analyses (IDA) "COUNTER AIR 90" study. That study had bemoaned the vulnerability of European air bases to new classes of Soviet non-nuclear TBMs, advocated major efforts by NATO to field its own conventional TBMs to

neutralize Warsaw Pact air bases, and argued that NATO needed surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) with anti-missile capabilities to counter enemy TBMs. The OSD sponsors of COUNTER AIR 90 had attempted to "end run" the Air Force and JCS and had presented the study at the highest NATO levels without laying the extensive political groundwork normally needed before a major new proposal can take root in the alliance. Not surprisingly, the COUNTER AIR 90 scheme was promptly squelched--no NATO air force (nor any major European defense contractor) shared its views on the impending obsolescence of air bases and land-based aircraft. No ally was eager to pay billions for new high tech missiles and radar systems made in America. After conducting their own "independent analyses", NATO air forces, in concert, rejected the study's assumptions, data, and findings.

Despite the denouement of COUNTER AIR 90, the basic philosophies of the antagonists had not wavered, and the confrontation remained "dormant" only until 1986, when the political "spill over" from the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) elevated the ATBM/TBM issue above the background noise level and reignited the old debate. With the end of their second term in sight, elements within the Reagan Administration sought ways to establish "a foot in the door" for SDI. Early fielding of a robust, space-based SDI system was clearly impracticable. But, why not deploy a simplified conventional array of ground-based radars and interceptor missiles in NATO which could draw upon "SDI spin-offs" and entice the Europeans into cooperating in SDI-related efforts? If the allies could be convinced that the next generation of Soviet TBMs would represent a "quantum leap" threat, it might be possible to field conventional ATBM systems in NATO while sidestepping the Europeans' aversion to SDI and anti-strategic missile systems (which Europeans believed would undercut the retaliatory underpinning of the alliance's Flexible Response deterrence strategy). Thus, the tremendous political momentum of SDI with its seemingly bottomless funding support [at that time] was the dynamo which

rekindled the "manned aircraft vs. missiles" debate and led to a renewed OSD/Army assault on several traditional Air Force roles and missions (Defensive Counter Air, Offensive Counter Air, and Interdiction) which were embedded in the ATBM/TBM issue.

The ensuing bureaucratic struggle was essentially (but not exclusively) bipolar. On one side stood the USAF fighter pilot community, along with the major NATO air forces and other allies of convenience. At the opposite pole were high-level factions in the Army and in OSD (specifically, a cabal within the Tactical Warfare Programs branch of the Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition (USD(A)/TWP). Top-down pressure for the Administration's bid for early fielding of a poor man's version of SDI (wrapped in a "non-threatening" ATBM label) came from the Deputy Secretary of Defense, who, in December 1986, directed the three services to elevate the priority of tactical missile defense (TMD) programs to a very high priority among their overall modernization efforts. The SDI Organization (SDIO) and its "green suit" sub-element, the US Army Strategic Defense Command (USASDC), were ready to channel SDI funds toward various ATBM projects with SDI-related applications. Within the inner circles of the Army's missile community (anchored at Huntsville, Alabama, and Fort Bliss, Texas) there was a flurry of activity to "get the train out of the station" and to procure 1) ATBM capabilities for the soon-to-be-deployed Patriot SAM system; 2) enhanced radars; and 3) new Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence (C3I) systems. Several defense contractors (with intimate ties to officials within USD(A)/TWP) pulled out all the stops to obtain contracts to develop an ATBM "air defense C3I architecture" for European air defense.

In the defense acquisition business, invention is often the mother of necessity. Hardware designs for the new missiles, radars, and C3I systems were already sitting on contractors' shelves. Elements within the Army air defense community were eager to reembark down the "anti-missile missile" path which had been blocked off since the scuttling of the SAFEGUARD system in the late 1970s. Buoyed by the prospects of obtaining new funds and armed with its "mandate" from the DEPSECDEF, the Army formed a

Joint Tactical Missile Defense Task Force (JTMDTF) in Huntsville in January 1987. The Air Force (represented by spokesmen from the Air Staff, Tactical Air Command (TAC), and the United States Air Forces in Europe (USAFE)) attended the kickoff meeting of the six-month (later expanded to 12-month) JTMDTF project. The Navy elected not to attend. The head of the task force (who also happened to be the Army's Program Manager for the Patriot SAM system) laid out a game plan which had been choreographed by the top echelons of the Department of the Army. The specified tasks were to redefine the threat, to develop the concepts and doctrine to support "anti-tactical missile" systems, and to sell the idea to the NATO allies. Because of the legal provisions of the ABM Treaty (and in light of the European allies' public aversion to SDI), information could flow between the TMD program and SDI activities, but the spheres could not be allowed to "overlap".

If Soviet TBMs truly represented a serious threat to NATO air bases and other forces in the field, it would have been logical to assume that appropriate TMD countermeasures would include a synergistic blend of passive defenses (e.g., hardening of targets), active defenses (shooting down in-flight TBMs with ATBMs), and offensive measures (destroying enemy TBMs before they could be launched), all linked with an enhanced, theater-wide C3I system. In reality, the JTMDTF participants understood that the political momentum was focused behind the active defense option--i.e., the PATRIOT ATBM option. In fact, the first White Sands tests of the PATRIOT in an anti-missile mode had already been scheduled. Other contracts were already being let (using "Nunn Amendment" funds designed to stimulate US-European joint weapons development ventures) to develop ATBM C3I architectures for NATO.

ATBMs (and the "ballyhoo" over the underlying Soviet TBM menace) represented an institutional threat to tactical air force operations in Europe. If the TBM threat were accepted at face value, the survivability of NATO air bases after the opening missile salvos of a conventional war would be called into question. And, if the only counter to the TBM threat were SAMs used in an ATBM mode, NATO's airmen would be obliged to cede

their premier role in air defense to Army air defenders. If policy makers in the US and NATO could be sold on the premise that Soviet TBMs were more of a threat to air bases and other key targets than manned aircraft, then the case would also have been made to divert resources from aircraft in order to develop new families of conventional TBMs for NATO. The upcoming deployment of the Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS) was already seen as a potential threat to the Air Force's interdiction mission. The task for the US Air Force was clear! It had overtake and board the fast-moving ATBM train which had left the station under a full head of steam, fight its way to the engineer's compartment, seize the controls, and get NATO's future air defense system back on track.

Implicit Air Force objectives were, inter alia: to debunk the overstated TBM threat to NATO air base operations, to reassert the tactical air force's principal role in the air defense arena, to reconfirm the primacy of the theater Area Air Defense Commander (in NATO's Central Region, this is the perquisite of CINCUSAFE, wearing his Commander of Allied Air Forces Central Europe (COMAAFCEN) hat), to "smother in the crib" any notions of developing additional NATO TBMs, to keep the allies in close formation, and, if possible, to prevent any further encroachment of the SDI juggernaut into NATO air operations until the services and other vested political interests could reduce it to non-threatening proportions. Since these objectives all happened to be in consonance with the best interests of the United States and the NATO Alliance as a whole, they could be vigorously pursued with clear conscience.

What strategy was used to drive the various ATBM activities underway in the US and Europe toward the Air Force's desired objectives? The combined mass and momentum (and often, the inertia) of the multiple bureaucracies involved in the ATBM issue made "direct confrontation" impossible. The plan was to skillfully ride the bureaucratic tide as a fully cooperative "partner" in each arena, while working to nudge each project in the desired direction. By predicting the trajectories of the several bureaucracies involved in ATBM projects, and by imparting small velocity vectors at the right times, it would be

possible to shape the bureaucratic collisions which would inevitably occur at future points in joint and allied ATBM efforts. Since all roads to a NATO ATBM system would eventually have to pass through USAFE territory--it was only natural for representatives of that MAJCOM to become players in the various ATBM arenas.

The first ATBM arena was the JTMDTF dominated by Army Missile Command (MICOM). The Army's campaign plan was laid out during the task force's kickoff session. Representatives from the Army intelligence community, in-house analysts, and contractors were tasked to dust off threat assessments and to underscore the need for defenses against "the next generation" of Warsaw Pact TBMs. Army C3I specialists were charged with integrating the complex requirements for detecting, tracking, and engaging enemy ballistic missiles. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), through its subordinate agency, the Combined Arms Combat Development Activity (CACDA), was to develop an overall concept for tactical missile defense operations. Representatives from SDIO and USASDC would work hand-in-hand with the task force director to find ways to use SDI spin-offs. The task force's recommendations were to be forwarded to the Army Chief of Staff, coordinated with the Air Staff, presented to the JCS, signed off by OSD, and, ultimately, approved by NATO. The Air Force attendees at the two-day JTMDTF kickoff session were enthusiastic contributors and even more enthusiastic "note takers," avidly absorbing the details of the Army's game plan. Following the kickoff session, direct Air Force participation in the task force was limited to a single officer who served as a "watchdog" for the Air Staff [AF/XO].

Immediately following the JTMDTF opening session, a comprehensive CINCUSAFE position paper on tactical missile defense was forwarded to the Air Staff and the other tactical air force (TAF) commands in USAF (TAC and PACAF). The TMD paper emphasized the need for a "balanced" approach to "extended" air defense in NATO. NATO had to grapple with the full array of Warsaw Pact air threats, of which manned aircraft represented the most formidable threat for the foreseeable future. A balance of passive defense, active

defense (with both manned and unmanned interceptors playing important roles), offensive measures (destroying threat systems before they could launch), and an integrated, theater-wide C3I system--under the centralized control of NATO air component commanders--were the pillars of the "balanced approach." Firing doctrine for SAMs with both anti-aircraft and anti-missile capabilities needed to reflect overall theater air defense priorities. The basic thrust was to address ATBMs and TBMs in a deliberate manner, as part of a comprehensive modernization of NATO's air defenses with a primary focus on the "air-breathing" threat which would carry new generations of precision-guided munitions.

As the overall air commander in the NATO Central Region, CINCUSAFE/COMAAFCCE would have operational control of allied air forces, air defense radars, and SAMs. His philosophy on the need for balanced theater air defenses was immediately adopted as the official TAF and USAF position. Meanwhile, the Air Staff undertook the analytical task of reassessing the relative threat posed by Soviet TBMs and manned aircraft, with predictable results--it was confirmed that aircraft would continue to constitute the principal air threat to NATO.

Meanwhile, USAFE, TAC, and the Air Staff presented a united front during the "chop" process for the TRADOC/CACDA-developed concept for TMD. "Active defense" (i.e., ATBM) options were placed in a more balanced perspective (and thus deemphasized). The semi-autonomous "decide, detect, and destroy" approach to missile defense, which had been advocated by Army ATBM proponents, was challenged as being out of synch with NATO's integrated, centralized philosophy for theater air operations. Every minute of delay during the coordination process highlighted the fact that the ATBM effort had turned the Army's "Concept-Based Requirements" paradigm inside out. Clearly, this was a case in which threat and concept development were in a "tail chase" to catch up with hardware

acquisition programs that were already underway. Worse yet, the end users--who happened to be CINCUSAFE/COMAAFCE and his other NATO regional counterparts--had yet to be convinced of the cost-benefits of systems which were being pushed down from above.

In Europe, an "unholy alliance" was struck between USAFE and US Army Europe (USAREUR): the latter was less than enthusiastic about an OSD/SDIO/contractor effort being forced down its throat which threatened to draw off money, manpower, and political emphasis from other high priority USAREUR projects in the theater. The fact that a separate "SAM bureaucracy" existed outside of USAREUR's headquarters in Heidelberg (i.e., the 32nd Army Air Defense Command at Darmstadt) was another chink in the ATBM armor. After achievement of a basic consensus between USAFE and USAREUR on the need for circling wagons to preserve programmatic balance and protect resources, a bold stroke was made. It was agreed to defer to USEUCOM as the theater coordinator for tactical missile defense efforts. An Air Force pilot at USEUCOM/J-5 became the project officer for bringing all US agencies in the theater "up to speed." Literally dozens of CONUS and in-theater agencies participated in the ensuing series of meetings, most of which were conducted at the "compartmented" level. Players changed so frequently that most of each subsequent meeting was taken up with education of new attendees. The effort became a time-consuming "black hole." Conducting business at the NOFORN level virtually assured that transfer of ATBM projects to NATO would be impossible. Finally, USEUCOM drafted a theater concept for tactical missile defense which was, not surprisingly, a clone of the USAF position on TMD. The USEUCOM draft was forwarded to the JCS and heartily endorsed by the Vice Chairman. No inroads had been cut into theater commanders' funds, and the once narrow focus on ATBMs had been thoroughly diffused.

The "joint" bureaucratic tactics cited above paled in comparison to the achievements made in the "combined" arena at NATO headquarters in Brussels. The principal US spokesmen in NATO for conventional ATBMs (OSD representatives from USD(A) and USD(P), the Department of the Army, and contractor representatives who shuttled back and forth

between Washington and Brussels) had not accurately assessed European motives at the outset, and were later helpless to make headway once NATO started off in altogether different directions. Despite their earlier public declarations in NATO fora, the British, Germans, Italians, and French were very much interested in participating in cooperative SDI technology efforts underwritten by the US. In contrast, they had no incentive to be swept up in a conventional ATBM effort which could only lead to massive outlays for US radars, missiles, and C3I system and the denigration of their current air defense assets. The tactical missile defense issue was tackled by the NATO Air Defense Committee (NADC) which formed ad hoc sub-groups on "the threat" and "countermeasures." OSD placed its key spokesmen on the threat group: USAFE placed its ex officio representatives on the countermeasures group, knowing that the response to the threat (no matter how defined) was the critical issue. The UK, in typical fashion, provided a brilliant parliamentarian (an RAF officer) to direct/dominate the threat group. The dilatory tactics of the UK chairman were masterful. The classification of new DIA threat assessments made this vital information "inadmissible evidence." The Soviet TBM threat was tied up in committee until the INF treaty sounded the death-knell for the threat sub-group. After the treaty, the UK claimed that their assessment had to restart "from scratch" and that the effort would likely be a breach of good faith with the Soviets.

Meanwhile, the Luftwaffe took the lead in the countermeasures sub-group. What followed was a classic, "exhaustive" analysis by the Germans of every conceivable response option, in the form of an expansive TMD matrix, which occupied the NADC for more than a year. [Ironically, the countermeasures group had agreed to its own "straw man" threat--in no way inferior to the proposals of its sister sub-group--during its first meeting.] The US Mission to NATO, a bastion of the State Department, was the "conference facilitator" for the endless meetings in Brussels, but could only watch helplessly as all serious prospects for ATBM cooperation "died in committee." JCS representatives to NATO (US representatives to the Military Committee) were excluded from State's NADC turf,

although, as noted above, the JCS position had already been imprinted with the Air Force position through parallel efforts. Ultimately, the NATO ATBM express train was slowed to a near standstill long enough for it to be derailed when the SDI "cash cow" became the object of political feeding frenzies in a constricted fiscal environment (even before Gorbachev absconded with the threat). After the real dynamo behind NATO ATBM efforts was disconnected (as SDI advocates manned their own barricades against program retrenchment) the contrived threat and conceptual imperatives for NATO ATBMs faded away.

LESSONS LEARNED: The account of the "anti-ATBM conspiracy" obviously contains a healthy dose of caricature and oversimplification. In reality, there were bona fide grounds for all points of view, and all the protagonists in each of the fora were smart, honorable, and hard-working individuals. The key point is not that the Air Force "won" in its efforts to underscore the need for balanced, fully-integrated (i.e., Air Force controlled) theater air defense programs (while defending the dignity of manned aircraft and crushing the life from the scheme for ATBMs in NATO). In fact, the international ATBM effort is alive and well today in the Middle East, where it has found a secure niche [and where it has important strategic implications]. The real lesson to be learned is that the common and unique characteristics of many different bureaucracies must be reckoned with before a major defense project can be assimilated in NATO. If the true rationale for a project is so convoluted that it must be "repackaged" before it can be sold to each forum, and/or if proponents of the system doggedly insist on "going against the grain" and are unwilling or unable to take advantage of the "natural resonance" of each bureaucratic entity, then the prospects for program success will be slim. An intimate knowledge of bureaucratic players, positions, and processes is a prerequisite for successfully achieving--or thwarting--an organization's policy goals.